

Journeying Above the Clouds

Account of a World's Record Balloon Trip by One of the Balloonists

By Charles C. Turner

THERE is something extraordinarily fascinating in ascending in a balloon from London with

the intention of crossing the sea to Europe and in absolute uncertainty as to where the journey will terminate—France, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Denmark, or Holland. There is no telling which may be your next resting place, or what language you may be called upon to speak to more or less astonished natives.

My balloon expedition for the "Daily Graphic" with Mr. A. E. Gaudron, captain of the balloon, and Captain E. M. Maitland, of the Essex regiment, for companions, was certainly the most remarkable ballooning feat ever known, from which the voyagers have returned to tell the tale. Probably the ill-fated Andree expedition to the North Pole went through many more striking adventures, but of these there is no record. They are lost in the gloom and silence of an unknown grave.

We ascended from the Crystal Palace, London, with the intention of traveling as far to the east as possible—even to Siberia. We desired to make a record distance, and only failed to do so by some eighty miles and that through being compelled to descend by the weight of a great quantity of snow settled on the balloon. But at that the journey to Russia has been described by the Comte Henri de la Vaulx, the holder of the world's record, and also by Mr. Frank Hodges Butler, the founder of the British Aero club, as the greatest balloon voyage ever made.

We ascended at 11:05 a. m. on Wednesday, November 18th, in a fair west wind and passed over the suburbs of London by way of Bromley.

The lower reaches of the Thames near Gravesend could be seen dimly through the haze. Then the River Medway, with its busy shipping, came slowly into sight. At 11:40 we could just see Chatham and Rochester.

The docks, with over a score of warships of various types, and with a great quantity of other shipping in view, made a remarkable picture, of which the prevailing color was grey. We passed directly over many warships, and I took some photographs which afford striking proof of the value of balloon photography from a military point of view.

Many of the photographs were taken from heights at which it is considered good results are impossible. Poor from an artistic point of view these pictures, nevertheless, possess great interest. During the voyage to Russia mist prevailed, making photography difficult, and in the case of the Sweden voyage nearly all my films were lost in the critical descent.

No land in sight.

AFTER passing Chatham, we crept up to a height of 5,400 feet and only occasionally caught a glimpse of the earth, one of these brief views showing us Whitstable, another affording a glimpse of the southern coast of the estuary of the Thames over which we were drifting eastwards. We left the coast near Queensborough.

Soon after one o'clock, the sun being obscured by denser clouds, we again descended. We passed through the clouds, and in a flash the sea became visible. Sea everywhere and no land in sight, the tens of millions of waves, looking very diminutive but crystal clear, and reflecting from their facets every degree of grey and green light and shadow. The sea was not rough, but the tops of an infinite number of the waves were broken to snow-white foam. As we descended nearer to it the incessant murmur of the commotion of waters reached us, a sound of unique quality and wonderful sweetness.

Having lightened the balloon, we quickly ascended, bringing our floater or water anchor, directly below, and then lifting it clean out of the water. The great lifting power of the balloon showed itself and having got the trailer clear, the dropping of the sea



Map showing course of Mr. Turner's 1117-mile balloon flight over land and sea last November.

water off the long rope further lightened us and we mounted steadily to 7,000 feet and were clear above the clouds. It was our first clear view of cloudland. Below us lay a vast white undulating plain. The sun, well on its way to the west, shone feebly through a thin veil of clouds. Here we saw the shadow of the balloon on the clouds surrounded by an aureole of colors. (This is the phenomenon called by balloonists as "glory.")

When, owing to falling temperature, we attained a lower level, we found ourselves still over the sea, and in view of two fishing boats. Far away in the south we could just make out a long, hazy line of land. Our course lay almost parallel with it, but would eventually intersect it at an acute angle.

Traveling in the night.

IT was at 3:40 that the balloon passed from sea to land near Ostend, and in the rapidly waning light we lost no time in trying to identify the villages, the towns, and the coast lights, one of which, far to the north, was a lightship with flashes at intervals of five seconds. A large scale chart of the North Sea showing all the buoys and lightships, was of great value here.

A distant view of Bruges, identified by the spire of the Cathedral, was seen dimly, far to the south of our course. Our passing from sea to land, and

our voyage over this country, created a great stir, judging from the cheers we heard. We threw out messages

in French, and one of them, we were rejoiced to hear afterwards, was picked up and transmitted to England.

Darkness came on, and we could not read the instruments or write without our electric lamp. We frequently heard voices hailing us from the ground, and once a bugle, sounding a military call, rang out. That it was a populous country could be seen by the large number of villages and small towns, whose lighting up for the night afforded us a pleasant spectacle. Antwerp, with its brilliantly illuminated boulevards,

was a particularly fine sight.

At a distance villages and towns were mere blotches of milky light in the blackness. As we approached one it would slowly grow, the blur resolving itself into a group of tiny points of light, becoming larger and larger and developing in character every minute. In the case of a large town the effect was very striking. What had appeared a small blur of light would extend until it covered half the visible area below with lights of every possible shade of yellow and white and the bluish white of electric lamps.

Two of us, in turns, during the darkness, coiled ourselves up as well as possible and shut our eyes, trying to sleep. As for myself, I can never quite lose consciousness in a balloon. I shut my eyes and resolutely banished thoughts of ballooning from my mind, but sleep does not follow. Ballooning at night becomes monotonous after a while. The monotony is broken by the spectacle of some city illuminated, but as our first night wore on, towns became infrequent and the country desolate.

During the early part of the night the temperature did not go lower than 28 degrees Fahr. We passed Dusseldorf and Elberfeld crossing the Rhine, where its banks are beautifully adorned with winding lines of lamps.

The night was beautifully fine, although not free from mist. Seldom could we see both stars and earth. A stratum of cloud blotched out one or the other. At 11 o'clock we were at 6,700 feet, below us a bank of clouds 500 to 700 feet thick. We moved up and down, now above the clouds and under a magnificent starlit sky, then moving downwards, and in sight of infrequent villages and cottages. The balloon alternated in this way through the field of cloud without interference by us in the way of attending to gas or ballast. Above the cloud there was greater cold, possibly depositing moisture on the balloon and causing it to descend to where a higher temperature and drier air again restored its buoyancy. We went through this performance nearly a dozen times in the course of four hours, and the experience showed the perfect obedience of a balloon to atmospheric influences, and also the very satisfactory equilibrium our great aerostat was keeping.

Silence seemed absolute.

ONLY occasionally could we hear the barking of a dog or the roar of a train. When above the clouds silence seemed absolute. We appeared to be going in the same direction as the clouds below, only faster than they. It was a curious race between the balloon and the patches of vapor, and the balloon never failed to overtake and to pass any point in the diversified field of gray upon which we set our eyes.

To make our vigil less arduous, we had provided ourselves with what I can best call an "alarum barometer," made from a design by Mr. Gaudron. This is a barometer which will give audible intimation when the balloon is descending below a certain level, or ascending above a level, five hundred feet being the space between the two levels, and this instrument can be



PREPARING FOR THE START.
A. E. Gaudron at left, Mr. Turner at center, Capt. Maitland at right.